

Research Meeting
May 30, 2013

Update on GiveWell Labs (Alexander):

We are considering how best to prioritize our shallow investigations. Up to now, we've been making progress through the list of possible shallow investigations one at a time, and the investigations take varying amounts of time. The main question that we want to answer is what is the minimum level of understanding necessary to be able to strategically prioritize causes. In the next few months we will have greater staff capacity for shallow investigations because of new staff coming on, so it's important for us to put time in now to figure out how to prioritize the shallows and best allocate that capacity.

There are two ways to define the depth of an initial investigation: either by time-limit or by the questions we'd like to have answered. As of now, we're considering a first stage investigation (a "super shallow") that involves about 10-12 hours of work and 2 conversations with experts in the field. We may not publish formal write-ups after this first stage, but we will create internal write-ups on what we learned. We are trying out a time-constraint at this point, to see how much we can get out this type of investigation. After these super-shallows, we'd prioritize topics. Shallow investigations might then involve about 1 week of research, and the next level of depth might last about 3 months.

Staff discussed the concern that doing a super-shallow investigation may be too limited to get an accurate picture of a potential cause, and therefore lead us to make arbitrary decisions, only with more certainty than if we had not done any initial research. One way of addressing this issue is to choose the right experts with whom to have conversations. Staff agreed that this is the most important decision for super-shallow investigations.

One way to prioritize super-shallows is where we feel two conversations could move our view significantly – where we know very little and could therefore learn a lot from two conversations. There are some topics, such as HIV/AIDS, where we've already done the equivalent of super-shallow research (or more), so 2 additional conversations might not be as valuable. Another input into prioritization is to choose different types of causes in order to learn more about whether our current process will work.

The first topics we're considering doing super-shallows on:

- Regulatory reform to improve businesses in developing countries
- Nuclear non-proliferation

- Antibiotic resistance
- Developing countries road safety
- Family planning in developing countries
- Education technology
- Innovative approaches to criminal justice in the US

Updates on what people are working on:

Cari: developing a communications strategy

Eliza: recently finished drafting GiveDirectly update, working to finish co-funding report

Tim: possible new top charities to compete with AMF and GiveDirectly

Elie: History of philanthropy, managing staff on projects

Natalie: financial accounting, working with web developer, donor management, working with volunteer to get us set up with Salesforce and changing to a new credit card processor